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Let every one in his own way devote a portion of his possessions, it matters not whether it be his labor, his money, or his thoughts, to the good of others. Whatever he does for their happiness will return in tenfold happiness to himself, for benevolence is the most divine of virtues.

ART. VII. — *The Life of HERMAN BLENNERHASSET ; comprising an Authentic Narrative of the Burr Expedition, and containing many Additional Facts not heretofore published.* By WILLIAM SAFFORD. Chillicothe, Ohio. Ely, Allen, & Looker. 1850.

ALONG the whole length of the Ohio river, in its endless succession of beautiful landscapes, and its many points of historical interest, Blennerhasset's island is perhaps the only spot which is sure to arrest the attention of the voyager on the stream. In the long, narrow, flat island, covered with a few ill kept farms, with one or two mean houses and straggling trees, there certainly is nothing to attract notice ; yet not a steamer passes it but that a group collects on the hurricane deck, to ask for the "shrubby which Shenstone might have envied," the "music that might have charmed Calypso and her nymphs," and the "wife who was said to be lovely even beyond her sex, and graced with every accomplishment that can render it irresistible." The name of Blennerhasset has invested it with a charm. Yet Blennerhasset was remarkable neither for any thing he did, nor for his ability to do any thing ; nor were his misfortunes greater than what often happen to men as worthy as he, in every mercantile community. The elegant mansion, however, which he erected, and the scholastic life which he led, in a remote wilderness, throws an air of romance over him, while his connection with the schemes of Aaron Burr gives notoriety to his name, to which his misfortunes lend a melancholy interest.

Herman Blennerhasset belonged to a family of some note among the gentry of Ireland, who traced their lineage back to the reign of King John. The residence of his parents

was Castle Conway, in the county of Kerry; but he was born in Hampshire, England, in the year 1767, while they were making a visit to some relative. He was educated carefully at Westminster school, and afterwards at Trinity College, Dublin, where he graduated with great credit. Soon after graduating; he began to read law at the King's Inns, in company with his relation and college friend, Thomas Addis Emmet, with whom he was admitted to the bar in the year 1790.

Before attempting the practice of the law, he spent some time in travelling over France and the Netherlands. He saw France suffering with the throes of the Revolution, and returning to Ireland, he found it rent with factions. His means were too ample to require him to submit to the drudgery of practising law. He was averse to taking part in the political warfare of the country. All his tastes inclined to a life of retirement and repose, which was impossible in Ireland at that time. The death of his father, in 1796, leaving him in possession of a large fortune, he resolved to emigrate to the United States, where he could pursue his favorite studies in quiet, at the same time that he could gratify his wish to live in a republic.

Selling his estate to his relative, Baron Ventry, he went to England to prepare for the voyage. He met there Miss Margaret Agnew, daughter of the lieutenant-governor of the Isle of Man, and granddaughter of General Agnew, who fell at the battle of Germantown. This lady is said to have been remarkably beautiful. She was tall and graceful; she had a very clear complexion, regular features, deep blue eyes, and dark brown hair. She was an accomplished French and Italian scholar, and thoroughly acquainted with English literature. Her manners fascinated all who conversed with her. She was, withal, an accomplished housewife, instructed by two maiden aunts in all the mysteries of pastry and needlework. Blennerhasset met, saw, and conquered. They were married; a large library, together with an excellent set of philosophical apparatus, was bought, and, in 1797, they arrived in New York.

After spending some months in New York, they crossed the Alleghany mountains, and reached Marietta in the fall of the same year. Before the winter was over, Blennerhasset

selected for his home an island in the Ohio river, fourteen miles below Marietta. The Mississippi valley was then almost an unbroken wilderness. The forty thousand settlers in what is now the State of Ohio only dotted the shores of some rivers with scattered germs of civilization. Pittsburg, the great mart of the valley of the Ohio, had scarcely fourteen hundred inhabitants. Marietta was a mere village; Cincinnati counted a population of six hundred; Louisville was still smaller; and Chillicothe had not been surveyed two years. In this great wilderness, Blennerhasset chose the spot perhaps the most agreeable to his tastes. The island secured solitude whenever it was wished; while the village of Belpre on the Ohio shore, settled by retired officers of the army of the Revolution, Marietta, colonized by a company of highly educated New Englanders, and some of the families of Wood county, the adjoining county on the Virginia shore,—afforded sufficient society. The island is long, and, about the middle, quite narrow. Blennerhasset bought the upper portion, containing about one hundred and seventy acres, and reared there the home which tradition and oratory have invested with the interest of romance.

The traveller sailing down the river, when some miles distant, saw the white walls of the house gleaming through an opening which had been cut through the trees on the head of the island. Except this white speck, all looked as wild as nature had made it. But on landing, a gateway was seen, ornamented with large stone pillars. Beyond, a well graded road with a gentle slope led through the forest trees to the general level of the island. There spread a lawn of several acres, from which every stump and root had been removed, and where clumps of shrubbery variegated the smooth-shaven green. Facing the lawn was a spacious mansion, presenting, with its wings, a front of one hundred and four feet. Beyond the house was a garden as large as the lawn, where devious paths, amid arbors covered with trailing vines, and the mingled hues of native flowers and exotics, together with choice wall fruit, were in strange contrast with the forest that waved its heavy boughs upon its borders. Beyond was an orchard and a kitchen garden, together with a farm of a hundred acres.

The house was furnished in a style which then had no parallel beyond the mountains. The hall was a noble apart-

ment, constructed on acoustic principles, that Blennerhasset's excellent playing on the violincello should be marred by no echo ; the walls, painted with a dark tint, the gilded cornice, and massive furniture gave this room quite a stately air. To this, the rich curtains, gay carpet, elegant furniture, and large mirrors of the drawing-room presented a pleasing contrast. In the dining-room, the sideboards were magnificent with plate. The chief peculiarity of the mansion, however, was the wing which contained the study. There, the ancient classics, the standard works of modern literature, a full collection of the recent French and German philosophers, a good telescope, a solar microscope, and a good collection of chemical and electrical apparatus, formed the implements of this pioneer in the wilderness.

The owner of the mansion was tall and slender in person, and stooped slightly. He had a marked though not a handsome face, which generally wore a grave expression. He was not a man of strong will or firm purpose, but was honest, kind, and confiding. Many of his generous acts are still remembered in the neighborhood. His unsuspecting honesty laid him open to frequent impositions. From a dread of earthquakes, he built the house of wood, instead of the fine stone which abounds near the island. And so great was his fear of lightning, that he closed the house and lay on a feather bed whenever there was a thunder storm. He studied for amusement, without ever becoming an adept in any branch of science. His knowledge of medicine was enough to enable him to administer doses to all his poor neighbors, and to fancy constantly that he was suffering from some dangerous illness. His only recorded experiment in chemistry was unfortunate ; conceiving that beef, if kept a sufficient time in running water, would be converted into a good substitute for spermaceti, he tried the experiment. But the fish of the river had so little respect for his science as to nibble the meat away before the experiment was finished. His music was more admired than his experiments in science ; some pieces of his composition are still remembered in Marietta. He was most at home with the old classic writers ; and it is said that he could repeat a considerable portion of the *Iliad* from memory. He was excessively fond of such sport as the island afforded, — shooting at quails and other small birds. His

sporting, however, was almost a practical bull ; for being very near-sighted, he only fired the gun after his wife or servant had pointed it.

Mrs. Blennerhasset was a very different person. Her remarkable beauty was heightened by every charm of grace, dignity, intelligence, and high breeding. Ladies who knew her well say they have not seen in America or Europe a lovelier woman or a more accomplished lady. Always dressed with taste, often brilliantly, surpassing every one in the dance, charming all with her manners, and soothing distress wherever it appeared, she was regarded with a passionate admiration. A young farmer rented a cornfield on the island, simply in order to catch a glimpse of her in her daily ride or walk. In all disputes between her husband and a guest upon a point in history, she was made arbitrator. Sometimes she would delight a favored party with her reading of Shakspeare. At the same time, she did all the shopping for the large household, cut out clothes for her husband and the servants, and often went into the kitchen to make cake or pastry. Her habits were well suited to the region. She was not only a fearless rider, but could walk with ease from the island to Marietta ; and, says her biographer, (Mr. Hildreth, of Marietta,) "she could vault with the ease of a young fawn over a five-rail fence, with the mere aid of one hand placed on the top rail, and was often seen to do so when walking over the farm and a fence came in the way of her progress. It was performed with such graceful movement and so little effort, as to call forth the wonder and admiration of the beholder."

Their life on the island passed very quietly. Blennerhasset found all the repose that he had longed for, and his wife urged him in vain to practise in the neighboring courts of law. Superintending his improvements, reading, experimenting in the laboratory, and firing his gun when some one had aimed it, formed his only occupation. This mode of life was varied with balls at Marietta and his own house, visiting, still more with receiving visits from his neighbors, together with an occasional visit from a cultivated emigrant, who, weary with floating down the river hundreds of miles between its uninhabited banks, was rejoiced to find this western Eden. They had lived here eight years, and two children were added to

their other blessings, when they saw Aaron Burr the first time.

What the plans of Burr were, it is impossible now to determine with certainty. It seems, however, that he intended to colonize so much of the tract of land on the Washita, called Bastrop's Grant, as he had purchased. The grant was to be void unless the tract should be occupied by settlers within a specified time, which had nearly elapsed. A more important part of his plan was the conquest of Mexico. The dismemberment of the Union was alleged at the time to be the main end of his design. But no proof has been brought to establish it as a fact; such a project was so hopeless that we cannot believe even Aaron Burr should have entertained it; and, moreover, on his death-bed, he solemnly and with great emphasis denied it. The invasion of Mexico had been suggested by Miranda, on his visit to the United States during the administration of John Adams. The most prominent men in the country approved it; nothing was wanted but the sanction of the government to carry it into execution. Under the presidency of Jefferson, when war with Spain seemed imminent, Burr revived the project. The leading men in the West took part in it; the partisans of the administration throughout the West favored it. Nothing was wanted but a declaration of war against Spain to set an invading army in motion. When it became known that there would be no war, most of Burr's adherents abandoned the scheme; not a few, however, continued firm, partly through his persuasion, partly from a belief that the president secretly approved it.

In the spring of 1805, before the plot was ripe, Burr sailed down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers to New Orleans to perfect it. He landed at Blennerhasset's island, and strolled over the grounds without approaching the house. A servant being sent to invite the stranger in, he spent the evening with the family. The visit was only such a casual visit as Mr. Blennerhasset commonly received from men of education who passed down the river; no allusion was made to the matter with which Burr was already busy. On his return in October, he again called at the island, but the host was not at home.

Blennerhasset spent the winter in New York, where he went chiefly to meet his old fellow-student, Emmett, who

had just left Ireland on account of the political troubles. In the beginning of December, he received a letter from Burr, regretting that they had not met on the island in the previous October. Flattered by the interest taken in him by the ex-vice-president, he wrote word in reply, expressing a hope that he might be honored with a share in any speculation which might, during his tour of the country, have presented itself to Burr's judgment as worthy to engage his talents. In making this advance, not merely a commercial or land enterprise was contemplated, but a military adventure was mentioned. He supposed the government was indignant at the aggressions of Spanish troops upon the American borders, as well as at the conduct of the Spanish minister at Washington. Under this impression, he supposed a speedy war with Spain was inevitable; and he offered, if a Spanish war should induce the government to call upon Burr, to engage with him in any enterprise to be undertaken for the conquest of any of the Spanish dominions. In the following April, 1806, Burr wrote a highly complimentary letter in reply. He stated that he had projected just such a speculation as Blennerhasset had mentioned, and which he would have suggested, had he found Blennerhasset at home in the previous autumn. He added, that it could not be begun before December, if ever; that as it could not be explained by letter, an explanation would be deferred until an interview could be had; and that there would be no war unless the country should be actually invaded by Spain.

In August, 1806, Burr visited the island again with his daughter, Mrs. Alston, arriving at noon, and leaving the next morning. While on the island, he had an hour's private conversation with Blennerhasset; and the next day, at Marietta, at snatched intervals, the conversation was renewed. Blennerhasset was assured, that the expulsion of the Spanish from the American territory then violated by them, or even an invasion of Mexico, would be pleasing to the administration, if it could be done without declaring war with Spain; and that such a war would be avoided as long as possible, although existing circumstances would probably occasion its commencement before he should engage in any operation. Persuaded that the government would not be adverse to such designs, provided they should be kept secret till their execution should

be legalized by a declaration of war, he tendered his services generally to Burr.

In the course of the same conversation, Burr said that the people of the Mississippi territory were so disaffected towards the government, that they would at no distant period revolt and call in foreign aid ; and when this time should arrive, the people of the Western States would be called on to determine to which section they would adhere. But he said this was a matter in which he was not at all concerned, though it was spoken of and feared at the seat of government. Both agreed that the people should be informed upon the subject, so that they might not be drawn unawares into a contest for which they were not prepared. Burr, before leaving, contracted at Marietta for the building of fifteen batteaux, capable of carrying five hundred men, and a large keel boat for provisions. After his departure, Blennerhasset wrote for the Marietta newspaper a short series of articles advocating the propriety of separating the West from the eastern part of the Union, and another series confuting the first. These papers, Blennerhasset afterwards stated, had no reference to their scheme, because their scheme had nothing to do with the United States ; his object was, partly, to prepare the minds of the people for what he considered an inevitable event ; but mainly, to divert public attention from the Mexican invasion, which he supposed the government would approve so long as it should be kept secret, though if it should become known, the administration would feel constrained to suppress it.

By this time, rumors of the intended expedition began to be noised over the country. They occasioned a general disquietude, and even alarm, which we complacently smile at in these days when such expeditions are rife. The government appointed secret agents to spy out its organization ; unusual powers were conferred upon the commanding general in the West ; the legislatures of the Western States enacted special laws to aid in suppressing it ; bands of hastily organized militia were posted along the Ohio, the Mississippi, and the rivers flowing into them ; and a bill suspending the operation of the *habeas corpus* act passed through one branch of Congress.

In October, Blennerhasset went to Lexington in Kentucky, with Mrs. Alston, who had been his guest since August, and her husband, who had just arrived at the island. Here he

observed Burr's popularity increasing, and no jealousy shown on the part of the government towards him. But before the month was ended, he received a special messenger from his wife, who was alarmed by the reports of three companies of militia being organized in Wood county, and of their intention to burn his house. On his way home, he met Charles Fenton Mercer, and spoke to him with great sensibility of the rumors that were afloat. He said he was the last man in the world who would disturb the peace of the United States; he had found in them an asylum the tranquillity of which he would never violate. He mentioned the plan of forming, on the Bastrop purchase, under the auspices of Burr, a colony of the most cultivated families in the Union, and strongly urged Mr. Mercer to join in it. When Mr. Mercer doubted the success of such a settlement begun under the auspices of Aaron Burr, Blennerhasset defended him with enthusiasm.

Soon after he reached the island, Burr joined him, on his return from a recruiting tour through Ohio and Kentucky. The crisis of the undertaking was too near for a long friendly visit; in a few days, Burr completed his arrangements with the boat-builders in Marietta, and Blennerhasset's family were again left to themselves. Not many days after, they heard that Burr had been arrested in Kentucky on a charge of "treasonable practices and a design to attack the Spanish domains and thereby endanger the peace of the United States," and discharged for want of evidence against him. Blennerhasset went for sympathy to Mr. Graham, who had lately arrived at Marietta, and who, he had understood from Burr, was one of their recruits. But learning from him that many of Burr's representations were false, that Graham was the agent appointed by the President to baffle the expedition, and that the President was resolved to use every means to suppress it, he returned home disheartened. The menacing tone of his Virginia neighbors, and the enactments of the Ohio legislature, added to his despondency. He was ready to abandon the whole project, when, on the 6th of December, a party of recruits from New York arrived at the island. Their presence and the exhortations of his wife overcame his better reason; he resolved to persevere, whatever might be the consequences. The President's proclamation being received,

the Wood county militia determined to seize Blennerhasset. But on the night of the 10th, he escaped down the river with the New York party. The next day, the militia found the island deserted.

Mrs. Blennerhasset had gone to Marietta, to obtain the boat which had been built expressly for her, to follow her husband. Finding it was confiscated with the other boats, she returned to the island with a heavy heart. On landing, she heard an unusual sound of riot, and found her shrubbery trampled down, the lawn torn up and strewn with rubbish, and, near the house, by a fire made of her garden palings, she met a group of drunken militia. Her presence inspired them with no feeling of respect. The larder and wine cellar were emptied, the rich furniture was destroyed, and servants were beaten who presumed to serve their mistress before waiting on the invaders. In her own room up stairs, whither she withdrew with her children, she was still harassed by the tumult, and narrowly escaped a rifle ball that was shot through the drawing-room ceiling. From such duress she was glad to escape on any terms. She took passage with her children in the rude cabin of a flat boat going down the river, and in January joined her husband again at Bayou Pierre, in the Mississippi Territory.

But instead of joining him on his triumphant march to the halls of the Montezumas, as a princess of some new realm, she found him a hunted fugitive, with all his hopes blasted, brooding over the happiness that he had flung away. There was little time for revery. He and Burr were soon arrested, but were both discharged for want of sufficient evidence. Burr fled in disguise to escape another examination. A reward was offered for his capture, the whole region was on the watch for him, he was arrested the third time on a road in the almost uninhabited wilds of Alabama, and taken to Richmond, in Virginia. There, on the 25th of June, indictments were preferred against him, Blennerhasset, and others. In June, Blennerhasset left Natchez, where he had been residing with his family, to visit the island. While stopping on the way with his friends in Lexington, he was arrested and held for trial on the indictment found at Richmond. Henry Clay, his counsel, made an ineffectual effort to procure his discharge. He was taken to Richmond, where, through

the long trial of Burr, he occupied himself in writing a brief statement, which he left incomplete, of his connection with the Burr scheme, in keeping a journal, and jotting down notices of men of mark who figured in the trial. Upon Burr's acquittal, the indictments against the others were dropped. Burr and Blennerhasset were required to give bail for their appearance at Chillicothe, in Ohio, to answer to a charge of misdemeanor; but the charge was never preferred against them.

Blennerhasset returned to Mississippi, where, about a year after, he bought a cotton plantation with the remains of his fortune.

Brighter days began to dawn upon him again. After two toilsome years, he again found a home. In Natchez, and on the neighboring plantations, he found a small, but choice, circle of acquaintances. He hoped, too, easily to repair his broken fortune. Cotton was sold for such exorbitant prices, that, with a well managed plantation, he might retrieve his losses in a few years. He indeed knew little about superintending a farm; he still divided his time between his study and society. But while he was with his books, his wife was riding over the plantation, giving all needful orders for its management. The war with England broke out, cotton lost its value, and the estate yielded him a bare subsistence. Bills contracted by Burr for the expedition, which Blennerhasset had guaranteed to the amount of twenty thousand dollars, were thrust upon him. His old home, the island estate, was made over to a Virginia creditor, and the once beautiful grounds were used for a hemp patch, the house for a barn. While thus deprived of revenue and beset by creditors, the old mansion on the island, filled with hemp, took fire and was burned to the ground.

Amid these new misfortunes, a new hope was held out to him. An old schoolmate, who was then Governor of Canada, wrote to him, inviting him to come thither and accept a vacant judgeship. He sold his lands, and emigrated to Montreal only to find his friend removed from office, and his own hopes destroyed. One resource was left. He still had a reversionary claim on some Irish estates, — a claim which he had always regarded as a thing of straw, but which was now a straw clutched by a drowning man. He bade farewell to

America, spent some years in England, residing with an unmarried sister, soliciting office from the government, and endeavoring to bring under its notice an invention which he hoped was of great value. After weary years, both schemes were abandoned. He withdrew to the island of Guernsey, and in 1831, in the sixty-third year of his age, in poverty, but solaced by the affectionate care of his one constant friend, he sank to his rest.

Mrs. Blennerhasset was now left alone in her old age, to support and educate three children. After eleven years of toil, she returned to the United States in the hope of obtaining from the government reparation for the injury done to her property, in the winter of 1806, in the name of the government, by officers acting under its authority. Henry Clay presented her petition in the federal Senate. The committee appointed to examine it reported that the claim was legal and proper, and that not to allow it would be unworthy a wise or just nation. It would, doubtless, have been granted; but while Congress were discussing it, she died in an humble abode in New York, soothed in her last hours by the charitable attentions of a society of Irish females.

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- ART. VIII. — 1. *On the Present State and Recent Progress of Ethnographical Philology.* Part I. Africa. By R. G. LATHAM, M. D. pp. 66.
2. *On the Various Methods of Research which contribute to the Advancement of Ethnology, and of the Relations of that Science to Other Branches of Knowledge.* By JAMES C. PRICHARD, M. D., F. R. S. &c. pp. 24.
3. *On the Results of the Recent Egyptian Researches in Reference to Asiatic and African Ethnology, and the Classification of Languages: A Discourse read before the Ethnological Section of the British Association for the Advancement of Science at Oxford, on the 28th of June, 1847, by C. C. J. BUNSEN, D. C. L., Ph. D.* pp. 46.
4. *On the Importance of the Study of the Celtic Language*